

# HERE'S my STORY

## "EVERYBODY COUNTED..."

**MRS. DENA HORN**

**M**y name is Dena Mendelowitz Horn. I was born in Bedford Stuyvesant, where my father was an Orthodox rabbi. He had come from Slobodka, Lithuania, where most of his and my mother's family perished in the Holocaust. He himself was not well and died in 1940, when I was just 7 and my brother 13.

Shortly after this, my mother, newly widowed at only 33, moved us to Crown Heights, which was a terrific place to grow up because it was such a wonderful, warm community.

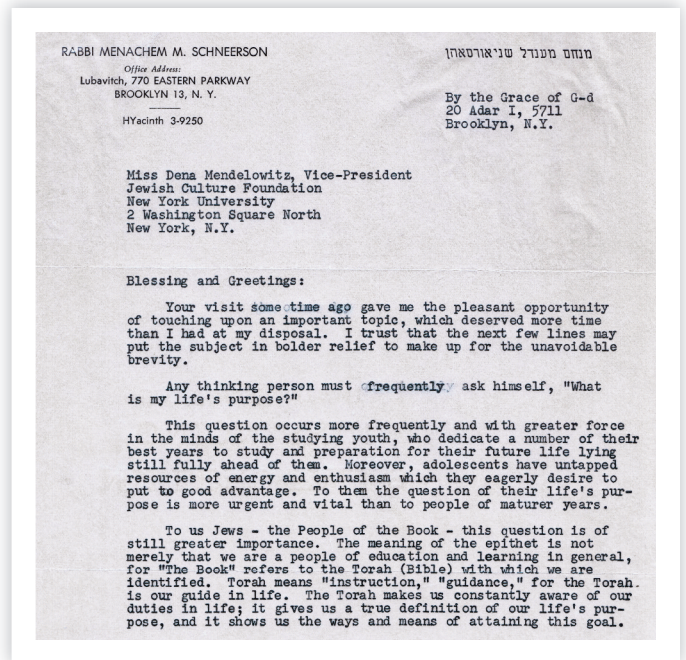
While we were living there, my mother became a follower of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I am not sure how it happened, but she was a single parent with children who were going through a difficult adolescence, and I guess she was looking for some sort of help and guidance and a shoulder to cry on. I don't know when she first went to the Rebbe for advice, but it was important and very reassuring for her when she did go. He was most welcoming to her, and when she felt the need for an appointment with him, she always got one.

I remember a couple of occasions, on Shabbos afternoon, I would be walking with my mom on Eastern Parkway when the Rebbe passed by. He would always touch the rim of his hat in acknowledgment of her, and that meant so much to her — she felt validated somehow.

After I enrolled in New York University, my mother asked me to come along with her to see the Rebbe. I don't remember much from that audience other than his piercing eyes which were so very sensitive, and that he asked me about my college experience. He wanted to know what I was learning, and I told him about my involvement with the JCF, Jewish Culture Foundation, of which I was vice-president at the time.

After this meeting, a most surprising thing happened. A long letter from the Rebbe arrived at NYU, addressed to me at the Jewish Culture Foundation. This is what it said in part:

*Your visit sometime ago gave me the pleasant opportunity of touching upon an important topic, which deserved more*



*time than I had at my disposal. I trust that the next few lines may put the subject in bolder relief to make up for the unavoidable brevity.*

*Any thinking person must frequently ask himself, "What is my life's purpose?" ... The life's purpose of every Jew, man or woman, has been clearly defined as far back as the revelation at Mount Sinai more than thirty-two-and-a-half centuries ago when we received the divine Torah and became a nation. We were then ordained as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." This means that every one of us must be holy in our private life; and in our association with the outside world — every one of us, man or woman, must fulfill priestly functions. The priest's function is to "bring" G-d to the people, and to elevate the people to be nearer to G-d. Similarly, every Jew and Jewess must fulfill his or her personal and "priestly" duties by living a life according to the Torah.*

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continued from reverse

*The extent of one's duty is in direct proportion to one's station in life. It's all the greater in the case of an individual who occupies a position of some prominence which gives him or her an opportunity to exercise influence over others, especially over youths...*

*This is your duty and privilege as one of the student officers in relation to your co-religionist colleagues and student body in general. I should also like to convey this message to your colleagues in the JCF. You are all no doubt aware of this, but perhaps there's room for added emphasis and the conviction that "it cannot be otherwise." No Jewish individual ought to be satisfied with the fact that as far as he personally is concerned he's doing his best to improve himself. He owes it to the next fellow to help him improve himself, too ...*

*In the light of the motto often used by my late father-in-law of sainted memory, that a Jew neither desires nor can he be severed from G-d, I feel sure that the thoughts expressed in the above lines will find their proper response in your heart and in the hearts of your colleagues and friends...*

This letter proved to have a profound impact on JCF programming. Henceforth, we always had some kind of study group and also, of course, a social every week to encourage Jews to bond with each other.

One of my co-officers at JCF was a young man named Bill Horn, and about this time we started dating. Bill did not come from a religious home like I did, and he had just started keeping kosher. My mother was not happy that I was becoming serious with him, and she asked Bill to meet with the Rebbe.

Bill did. He was enormously taken with the Rebbe's warmth and how comfortable the Rebbe made him feel. He had been given instructions not to shake hands with the Rebbe and not to sit in the Rebbe's presence, but the Rebbe shook his hand himself and invited him to sit down. This really relaxed him right away. Bill explained to the Rebbe the opposition to our marriage on both sides — my mother's concerns, which the Rebbe already knew about, and his father's concerns that we were too young.

Then the Rebbe suddenly asked Bill, point-blank, to justify why he should marry me. I suppose Bill gave the right answers because the Rebbe gave us his blessing, and he even met with Bill's father to allay his fears.

But he did even more than that. On the day of our wedding — which was on the second day of Rosh Chodesh Adar

Bet, March 6, 1954 — he sent a letter to be hand delivered to my mother. This is what it said in Yiddish:

*Rebbetzin Rochel, may you live and be well.*

*Blessings and Greetings,*

*Upon the wedding of your daughter, Dena, may she live and be well: May it be at a good and auspicious time. I offer my wishes that the marriage be a permanent edifice based on the foundations of Torah and mitzvos. And may you have from them... much yiddishe nachas — which is the truest nachas — in good health and happiness.*

*And may your personal life be setup in an appropriate way — both materially and spiritually.*

*With blessings of Mazel Tov, Mazel Tov,*

*M. Schneerson*

There's no question what this letter did for my mother — the reassurance that it gave her. The Rebbe was not just blessing our marriage, he was remembering her and telling her to begin thinking about her spiritual life now that her children were out of the house. She was affected by this message and even visited Israel by herself after that.

As for us, the letter caused elation on every level. How he even remembered the date! To him everybody counted, and every Jew was important.

*Mrs. Dena Horn is the former principal of the elementary division of the Solomon Schechter School of New Jersey. She is the wife of Rabbi William B. Horn, the rabbi emeritus of Congregation Ohr Shalom in Summit, NJ. She and her husband were interviewed in Summit New Jersey, in December, 2013.*

לע"נ ר' ישראל יעקב וזוגתו מרת קריינא ע"ה לאקשין  
ע"י בניהם ר' נחמן ור' אברהם ומשפחתם שיחיד

## This week in...

> **5712— 1952** marking his 50th birthday, the Rebbe unexpectedly delivered a *chasidic* discourse titled "G-d open my mouth..." in his private study to a small group of *chassidim*. This would be the first time the Rebbe delivered a *chasidic* discourse in honor of his birthday.<sup>1</sup> 11 Nissan

1. As told by Rabbi Sholom Chaskind for the My Encounter with the Rebbe project. Living Torah disc 86, program 344.

Dedicated in loving memory of  
**Reb Moshe Freundlich, OBM**  
הרה"ח ר' משה ב"ר שלמה ז"ל  
Yahrzeit, 10 Nissan

By **Danny and Chana Sara Freundlich**

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